

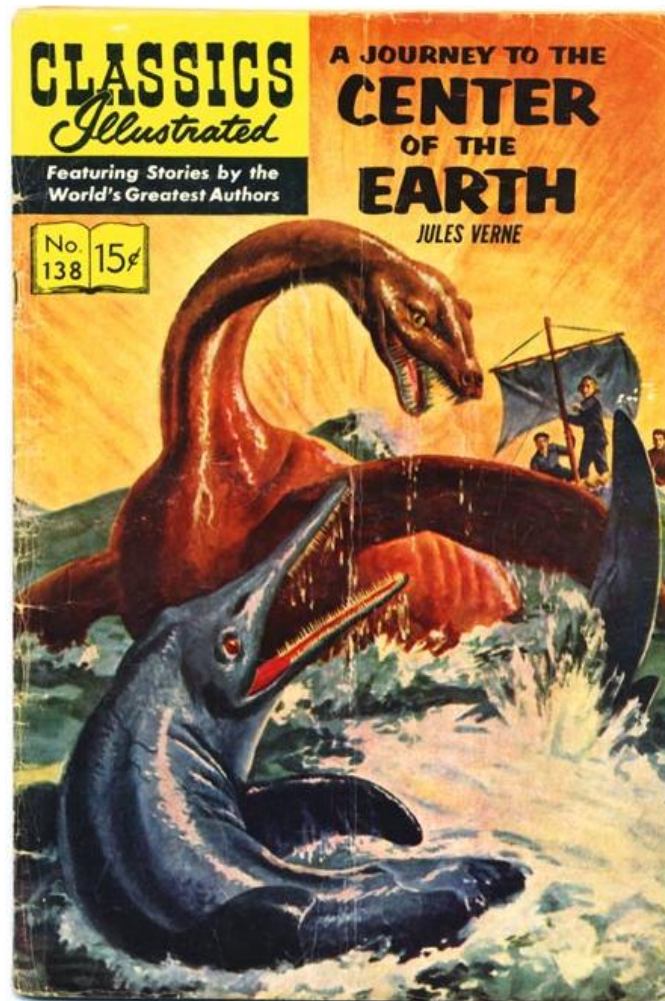


## Communist University Introductions

*These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.*

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### The Classics, Part 0, Introduction



“Classics Illustrated” comic

# What is a Classic?

There is no last word on what the Marxist “Classics” are, or might be. There will be no attempt here to lay down a definitive, prescriptive “canon”. Instead, what we will be doing is creating a framework around which individuals might wish to build up or to flesh out their own ideas of what “The Classics” consist of.

We will go from Marx and Engels in the mid-1840s to Lenin, Luxemburg and Gramsci, towards the mid-1920s. We will use some material that already appears in our other courses, together with works that have not yet been used in any of these courses, but which are “classics” nonetheless.

The one “classic” we will not include is Karl Marx’s “Capital”. The CU has a separate ten-week course on Capital, Volume 1, and another ten-week course covering Volumes 2 and 3. But we will include part of Marx’s “Wages, Price and Profit”, and part of his “Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy”, both of which are classics in their own right, and which also give more than a taste of the ideas laid out in the great work, “Capital”.

Lenin in his “[The State and Revolution](#)” (a classic, and itself a review of the classics) wrote that in his opinion “[The Poverty of Philosophy](#)”, written and published in 1847, is “the first mature work of Marxism”.

But we will begin in Brussels, Belgium, in early 1845, shortly after Marx and Engels had (in Paris, in August 1844) teamed up. As we know, they stuck together from then on, until death parted them. We will begin with the short piece of work by Karl Marx that is known as the “[Theses on Feuerbach](#)”, named as such by Frederick Engels, and published by Engels in 1888, five years after the death of Karl Marx.

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Karl Marx being arrested in Brussels, 1840s.

## Marx: Theses on Feuerbach

Any one of the eleven short [Theses on Feuerbach](#) (attached) would be adequate on its own as a topic for discussion in a study circle. The most famous of them is the last one:

*“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”*

The attached document shows Marx, in 1845, as being firmly in the camp of those humanists for whom the active, free-willing Subject is the centre and the starting point of all philosophy and all politics.

It puts Marx in the opposite camp from those “materialists” who regard the human as derivative of, and secondary to, the purely physical. Marx never shifted from this strong and logical position. Marx poses the Subject in a dialectical relation with the

Objective universe, but the Subject is the one with the initiative. The Subject makes things happen. The Subject can change the world – and that’s the point.

This is different from the idealism that ignores the material world, and it is equally different from the materialism that prioritises the mechanical over the mental. Thus, Marx settles the controversy over “dialectical materialism” right here, at the very beginning of Marxism.

Ludwig Feuerbach’s intervention into the philosophical debates of the early 1840s created a sensation in the intellectual crucible that included Marx and Engels as well as the “Young Hegelians”, with whom Marx and Engels were in the process of falling out.

Reading the eleven “Theses” reveals that Marx immediately recognised Feuerbach as a materialist, but also that he at once rejected Feuerbach’s particular and limited kind of anti-subjective materialism.

Thesis number two says that truth is a practical question. This is something that is repeated later on in the “classics” of Marxism. It reinforces the assertion that the world or universe is a human world or universe. *“It is men who change circumstances”* says Marx in the third Thesis, and *“human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”*

The subsequent Theses develop this understand through to Thesis 10 which says: *“The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity.”*

This is a good reminder that for Marx in particular, the term “civil society” only means “bourgeois society” [*bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*], and that therefore for Marxists, “civil society” is something to be overcome and transcended, and certainly not something to be put on a pedestal and worshipped.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Theses on Feuerbach, 1845, Marx.](#)
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Statue of Marx and Engels in Marx-Engels-Forum, Berlin, Germany

## The German Ideology

From August 1844, when they re-met in Paris, France, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels began a lifelong collaboration. They at once began to write together the book that was published the following year as [“The Holy Family”](#) – a polemic against the “Young Hegelians”, otherwise called “The Free”, who were a group of German political intellectuals (“Saint Bruno” Bauer, “Saint Max” Stirner, and others).

But it was in their second major joint work that the two managed to firmly lay down the basics of what we know as Marxism, in the book called [“The German Ideology”](#), again critiquing the Young Hegelians, and now also Ludwig Feuerbach. This manuscript was written between 1845 and 1847 but it was never published, or even prepared for publication, during the lifetimes of the two authors, Marx and Engels.

The [“Theses on Feuerbach”](#) that we studied as our previous item are said to be notes of Marx’s in preparation for “The German Ideology”, according to the [Preface to this work in Progress Publishers’ Collected Works](#) of Marx, which also says of “The German Ideology” and its associated writings:

*“They were all written between the spring of 1845 and the spring of 1847, during Marx’s stay in Brussels, where he moved in February 1845 following his deportation from France by the Guizot government. Engels came to Brussels from Barmen in April 1845 and remained till August 1846. **This was the period when Marxism was finally evolved** as the scientific world outlook of the revolutionary proletariat. Marx and Engels had arrived at the decisive stage in working out the philosophical principles of scientific communism.”*

For those who seek the precise origin of “Marxism” this is the Holy Grail. Progress Publishers go on:

*“It was in The German Ideology that the materialist conception of history, **historical materialism**, was first formulated as an integral theory. Engels said later that this theory, which uncovered the genuine laws of social development and revolutionised the science of society, embodied the first of Marx’s great discoveries (the second being the theory of surplus value) which played the main role in transforming socialism from a utopia into a science.”*

What is this thing called “historical materialism”? Here are two paragraphs from the attached chapter of The German Ideology that is also downloadable via the link below.

*"This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e. civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; describing it in its action as the state, and to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. arise from it, and trace their origins and growth from that basis. Thus the whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)...*

*"It shows that history does not end by being resolved into "self-consciousness as spirit of the spirit", but that in it at each stage there is found a material result: a sum of productive forces, an historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor; a mass of productive forces, capital funds and conditions, which, on the one hand, is indeed modified by the new generation, but also on the other prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it a definite development, a special character. It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances.”*

Later on the work says says *“In reality and for the practical materialist, i.e. the communist, it is a question of revolutionising the existing world, of practically attacking and changing existing things.”*

The point is to change the world, as the eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach says.

In the last part of the chapter, in the part called *“Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas”*, you will read the following well-known, classic words:

***“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.”***

The [Progress Publishers Preface](#) quotes Marx as writing, in 1859, about “The German Ideology”:

*“We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose — self-clarification.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Karl Marx, The German Ideology, 1845-1847, Part 1, B, Illusion of the Epoch.](#)
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Frederick Engels, 1841

## Engels and the Labour Movements

The [Marxists Internet Library's Encyclopedia](#)'s entry on *Rheinische Zeitung* starts thus:

"The *Rheinische Zeitung für Politik, Handel und Gewerbe* was founded on January 1, 1842. It was, generally, a pro-democracy [reformist](#) publication of the Rhine's bourgeois opposition to Prussian absolutism. [Dr] Karl Marx wrote his first news article for it on May 5 1842 [his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday]. By October 1842, he was named editor.

"On November 16 1842, *en route* to England, Engels paid a visit to the *Rheinische Zeitung* offices – where he first met the new editor. Engels' time in England would result in a series of articles for the RZ – and those would, in turn, lead to his famous book, [The Condition of the Working Class in England](#)."

The *Rheinische Zeitung* was Karl Marx's first, and probably his only ever regular employer, but the record shows that Frederick Engels had an article published in the *Rheinische Zeitung* even before Marx arrived there. Therefore they must have known each others' writing even before they met in 1842.

The two teamed up for good in Paris, in August 1844, by which time Marx was already in exile from his native Germany. The question in this first part of our



“Classics” course remains: When did these two become “Marxists”? And the answer is that the crucial transition took place through their joint writing of “[The German Ideology](#)”, from 1845 onwards.

A related question could be: What did each of them separately bring to “Marxism”? The text today can serve to show that Frederick Engels brought with him a strong sense of the historical destiny of the working class. It is the chapter on “Labour Movements” from Engels’ “The Condition of the Working Class in England” (attached; download linked below).

It seems that by 1844 when they re-met in Paris, these two young men, Engels at 24 and Marx at 26 years old, had both already formed the unusual opinion that the working class was destined to be the gravedigger of the capitalist bourgeoisie.

For all of the historical materialism, and the later discovery of the Marx’s theory of surplus value, yet without a candidate for the role of free-willing revolutionary agent and Subject of History there was never going to be a communist movement. Marx and Engels agreed that the communist revolutionary Subject was bound to be the working proletariat, and they never subsequently wavered from that view.

Engels’ research into the working class in (at the time) its most advanced condition in the world was quite crucial for both of their ability to take the partisan view in favour of the working class that they did take. It gave them the empirical, abstract factual knowledge that allowed them to concretise their revolutionary project with confidence. Hence this book of Engels’, his first, is certainly a classic. As he put it in our attached and downloadable chapter:

*“These strikes... are the strongest proof that the decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is approaching. They are the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided...”*

It is a classic in at least two other ways. It is a classic example of the well-organised marshalling and synthesis of library research, interview research and personal observation. It is also a classic of urban social theory or urbanism, of which it is the pioneering text.

**Image:** Frederick Engels in his military year, 1841.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Condition of the Working Class in England, Labour Movements, 1845, Engels](#).



[Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#) and his daughters, by [Gustave Courbet](#), 1865

## The Poverty of Philosophy

In Chapter 2 of his 1917 between-two-revolutions work “[The State and Revolution](#)”, V I Lenin notes that:

*“The first works of mature Marxism — [The Poverty of Philosophy](#) and the [Communist Manifesto](#) — appeared just on the eve of the revolution of 1848.”*

Among other things, “The State and Revolution” was Lenin’s course on The Classics, moving through the works of Marx and Engels and revealing the spine or theme of an entire body of work - the Marxist “canon”.

We have already looked at this question. [The German Ideology](#) and the [Theses on Feuerbach](#), written between 1845 and 1847, were not published in full until 1932, long after Lenin’s death in 1924. These works should also be recognised as the “first works of mature Marxism”.

So we can see a reasonably clear-cut beginning to the “canon” of Marxism, in terms of time and of specific works: the “Theses on Feuerbach”, written in Brussels in early 1845, followed by “The German Ideology”, and then by “The Poverty of Philosophy”, and then by the “Communist Manifesto” in the beginning of 1848. But what is the nature of this beginning, as revealed in these works?

One part of the answer to this question is polemic. This is a kind of argument that proceeds from criticism of an opponent’s ideas expressed in text, which is then carefully examined and dissected.

These works are polemical. “The German Ideology” was a polemic against Bruno Bauer and [Max Stirner](#), the latter being an anarchist who had previously published a book called “The Ego and Its Own”. Another anarchist opponent of Marx and Engels in the early 1840s was [Wilhelm Weitling](#), who wrote a book called “Gospel of Poor Sinners”, published in 1847.

The Poverty of Philosophy, started in January 1847 and published the same year, was a polemic against a third anarchist, [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#), who had written a book called “[The Philosophy of Poverty](#)”.

In case we should get too particular about the term “anarchism”, it can help to recall what Lenin wrote in Chapter 3 of The State and Revolution, namely that *“anarcho-syndicalism... is merely the twin brother of opportunism.”* The imprecision of anarchism is one of its faults. Its distinction from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois liberalism is not clear. Marx’s polemic is directed against these faults, and others.

We may as well use this opportunity to remind ourselves that there was no innocent Garden of Eden for Marxism before it was assailed by anarchists, “ultra-lefts”, revisionists, reformists and all sorts of deviationists, *escamoteurs* and demagogues. In fact, there was not even as much as one minute of peace for Marxism before it had to contend with all of these kinds of opponents. On the contrary, Marxism was actually conceived within this very same argument. The argument with the anarchists was itself the creative act. There was no Marxism prior to its polemical fights with anarchism, and Marxism is fated to contend with these same foes in their many variations until the day that class struggle finally ends, and the communist parties disband themselves.

The selected text from The Poverty of Philosophy, downloadable via the link given below, is a compilation of Part 3 of Chapter 2, together with the last pages of the book.

It is not necessary for our present purposes to follow every twist and turn of Marx’s argument in Part 3 of The Poverty of Philosophy. Most of it is in any case lucid and

clear, although it is sometimes not easy to tell which is Marx's own voice, and which is Marx speaking satirically, in Proudhon's voice.

Highlights include the following passage, where Marx anticipates both "Capital", Volume 3, and also the current banking crisis and the US home-loan bubble:

*"Competition is not industrial emulation, it is commercial emulation. In our time industrial emulation exists only in view of commerce. There are even phases in the economic life of modern nations when everybody is seized with a sort of craze for making profit without producing. This speculation craze, which recurs periodically, lays bare the true character of competition, which seeks to escape the need for industrial emulation."*

In the final part, Marx begins by advocating "combination", which is the creation of mass democratic organisations, especially trade unions. He finds the "twin brothers" - the reformist bourgeois economists, and the utopian socialists - both arguing against combination; yet he notes that the more advanced the countries become, the greater is the degree of combination. Association then takes on a political character, says Marx.

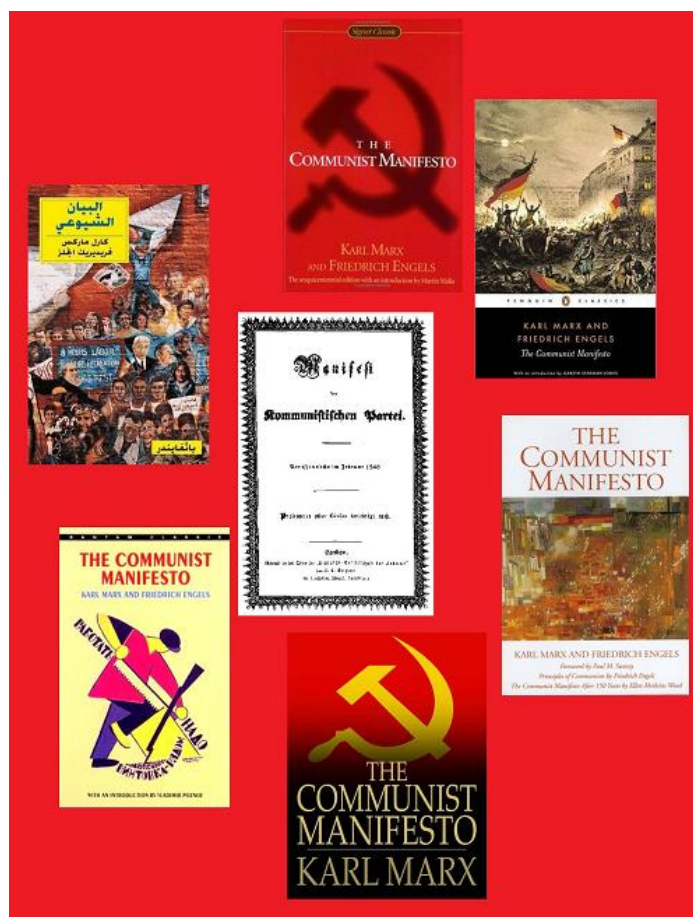
In the final page Marx writes:

*"An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society... The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of every class... ...there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society... ...the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution."*

This is classic Marxism.

- The image is a reproduction of a painting of [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#) made in 1865 by the Realist painter and revolutionary [Gustave Courbet](#). In 1871 Courbet was placed in charge of all art museums by the Paris Commune. After the fall of the Commune, Courbet was punished and exiled to Switzerland, where he died.
  - The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Poverty of Philosophy, Karl Marx, 1847, excerpts](#).
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The Communist Manifesto is constantly re-published

## Bourgeois, Proletarians and Communists

The [Communist Manifesto](#) is a classic by any standards. It is never out of print and is stocked in ordinary bookshops all over the world, selling steadily year after year.

The work was started in mid-1847 in England by Frederick Engels and Karl Marx when Marx was 29 and Engels was 27. The work was published in January or February of 1848, just in time for the outbreak of revolutions all over Europe.

All of the Communist Manifesto is memorable, but especially the first two parts ("[Bourgeois and Proletarians](#)", and "[Proletarians and Communists](#)"), attached. The third part is called "[Socialist and Communist Literature](#)" and the fourth part, of one page, is called "[Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties](#)". A fifth part that was drafted, but not included, is the catechism- or FAQ-style document called "[The Principles of Communism](#)" drafted by Frederick Engels.



## **Bourgeois and Proletarians**

The new masters, the formerly slave-owning but now capitalist bourgeoisie, also known as burghers or burgesses, were a class that had grown up in the towns under the rule of rural-based feudalism. Marx and Engels were convinced that the bourgeoisie were themselves sooner or later going to be overthrown by the working proletariat. This was the class of free citizens (i.e. not slaves) owning nothing but their Labour-Power, that the bourgeoisie had brought into existence by employing them. The bourgeoisie were taking over from the feudal lords by revolution. They would themselves be toppled by revolution – proletarian revolution – said Marx and Engels.

Commissioned to write the Manifesto by the Communist League, Marx and Engels struggled to meet the agreed deadline, but came through with a magnificent text published just prior to the February, 1848 events in Paris. These events brought the proletariat as actors on to the stage of history to an extent that had never been seen before, thoroughly vindicating Engels and Marx.

Short as it is, the Manifesto is so rich and so compressed as to be saturated with meaning. It is practically impossible to summarise. Here are some of the most extraordinary sentences of the first section of the Manifesto:

*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*

*Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other - bourgeoisie and proletariat.*

*The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.*

*All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.*

*All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.*

*The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.*

## Proletarians and Communists

The second part of the Communist Manifesto contains statements about the Communist Party, about the family, about religion, and frank statements about the bourgeoisie.

The second part shows, among other things, the centrality of the relations of production that create and sustain the effect known as capital, which then in turn defines everything else in bourgeois society.

“Proletarians and Communists” also looks forward to the way that society can be changed, and thus serves to remind us that Marx’s work is always intentional, and is never merely empirical, descriptive or disinterested.

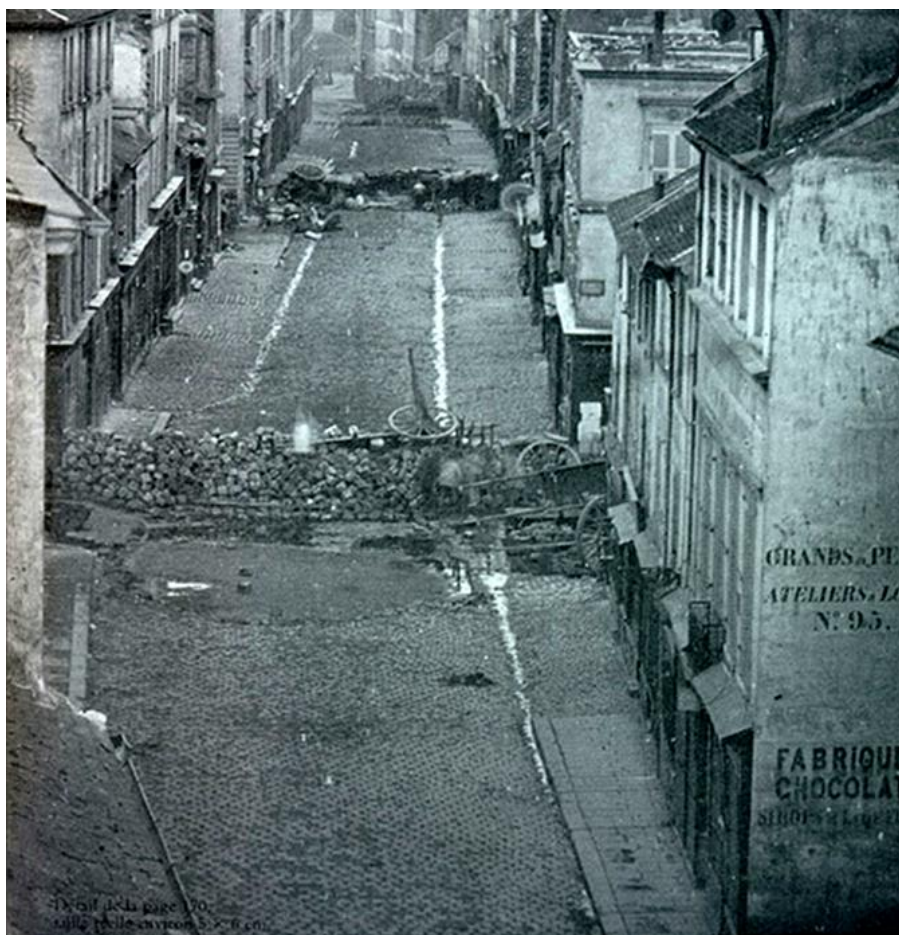
*“The average price of wage labour is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer,”* wrote Marx and Engels.

*“But does wage labour create any property for the labourer? Not a bit. It creates capital, i.e., that kind of property which exploits wage labour, and which cannot increase except upon conditions of begetting a new supply of wage labour for fresh exploitation.”*

They finish the section with this unforgettable, classic vision:

***“...a vast association of the whole nation... in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”***

- The above is to introduce the original reading-texts: [Bourgeois and Proletarians](#), and [Proletarians and Communists](#), Communist Manifesto, Marx/Engels, 1848.
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Barricades, Paris, July 1848

## The Class Struggles in France

The three great classic works that Karl Marx wrote on class struggle in France have a special place in the Marxist canon. They establish the literary form, or “genre”, of revolutionary political economy, and so they are the fore-runners of the typical revolutionary political analysis as done by Lenin, Mao and Cabral, for some examples among many.

They record the disastrous consequences of class isolation: two revolutions (1848 and 1871) drowned in the blood of the Parisian working proletariat. And together they (but particularly the “18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire”) establish Marx as a writer of the first rank.

Let us look at this last, literary point first. Marx, though born and brought up in Germany, was already as a young man a fluent French-speaker and writer. Marx and his new bride Jenny von Westphalen moved to Paris in October 1843 after the

banning, in April of that year, of the magazine *Rheinische Zeitung* of which Marx had been the editor.

During the following five years Marx was thrown out of Paris twice, moving first to Brussels (from which he was also thrown out) and finally settling in London, where he struggled with the language at first, helped by Frederick Engels who was a good English-speaker.

So by 1848 Marx was more than familiar with the highly-developed and sophisticated French literary and political culture of his time. He was a top expert, and this comes through in these works on France.

One consequence is that Marx makes all sorts of references and allusions to French personalities and customs that are not familiar to readers who have been brought up reading other languages such as English. But it pays the reader to get used to these, and to press on, leaving detailed explanations for later, but absorbing the main story.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century France was the most politically advanced country as a consequence of the Great French Revolution, which had burst out less than six decades earlier, in 1789, and which had swept out feudalism from France and menaced and attacked feudalism all over Europe. By 1848 the French Revolution was still more recent than the Second World War is to us in 2015. The July, 1830 reactionary coup that had brought Louis Philippe, the Duke of Orleans, to power was more recent in 1848 than the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP is to us now.

“The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850” (Part 1 is attached, and downloadable via the link below) is a book that describes the changing “conjuncture” of France in those years. It describes the dynamic balance of class forces as between workers, peasants, landlords and bourgeoisie. It describes the dynamics of conflict between the different, conflicting internal fractions of the bourgeoisie. And it describes Louis Bonaparte’s unprincipled, opportunist way of balancing such contending classes and playing them against each other, which has forever afterwards given us the word “Bonapartism”.

This main text describes the struggle in the months between February 1848 when the regime of Louis Philippe was overthrown, to June 1848 when their allies turned on the working class, isolated them, and massacred them.

*“The workers were left no choice,” wrote Marx, “they had to starve or let fly. They answered on June 22 with the tremendous insurrection in which the first*

*great battle was fought between the two classes that split modern society. It was a fight for the preservation or annihilation of the bourgeois order. The veil that shrouded the republic was torn asunder.”*

3000 captured proletarian revolutionaries were shot in cold blood by troops loyal to the bourgeoisie. This first direct fight between the two leading modern classes produced, not civilised behaviour, but instead unprecedented barbarity from the ruling bourgeois class. The barbarity was repeated 23 years later at the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871.

What *The Class Struggles in France* does for us is to demonstrate the realities and permutations of class conflict. It shows once again how the working class must have allies, and it shows how treacherous, brutal and ruthless the bourgeoisie can be. It also shows how lightning-fast revolutionary events can be.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: Part 1 of [Karl Marx's "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850"](#).**
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Louis Bonaparte's balancing act

## The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

In the following cut from “The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (open the attachment or click on the link below for a download containing a longer selection) it is clear that the proletariat suffered a disaster when it had no allies and was isolated and attacked by all the other classes together and massacred in June of 1848 in Paris.

This is the situation that the proletariat must always avoid. It is one reason why the working class must always have allies. Here is part of Marx’s outline of the events:

*“a. May 4 to June 25, 1848. Struggle of all classes against the proletariat. Defeat of the proletariat in the June days.*

*“b. June 25 to December 10, 1848. Dictatorship of the pure bourgeois republicans. Drafting of the constitution. Proclamation of a state of siege*

*in Paris. The bourgeois dictatorship set aside on December 10 by the election of Bonaparte as President.”*

In the “18th Brumaire” the contenders of the Great French Revolution reappear, namely the Aristocracy, the Peasantry (nicknamed the “*Montagne*” – “The Mountain”), the Bourgeoisie and the working Proletariat. Also described are the serious contradictions within the bourgeois class; the apparently classless, certainly manipulative Bonaparte, who played the four main classes off against each other for more than two decades until he lost the plot; and the “*lumpen proletariat*” of idle adventurers who were Bonaparte’s willing, and paid (with “whisky and sausages”) accomplices.

Juggling the different class interests and playing the different classes against each other is what is now called “Bonapartism”. Louis Bonaparte did it for twenty years. Thabo Mbeki managed for only ten. In both cases the main beneficiary turned out to be the bourgeois class.

Here are four more of the most well-known paragraphs taken from page 11 of our 16-page selection from the “18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire” that reveal a lot of the class dynamics that Marx describes in this classic work:

*“Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. The state machinery has so strengthened itself vis-a-vis civil society that the Chief of the Society of December 10 [Louis Bonaparte] suffices for its head — an adventurer dropped in from abroad, raised on the shoulders of a drunken soldiery which he bought with whisky and sausages and to which he has to keep throwing more sausages. Hence the low-spirited despair, the feeling of monstrous humiliation and degradation that oppresses the breast of France and makes her gasp. She feels dishonored.*

*“And yet the state power is not suspended in the air. Bonaparte represented a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small-holding peasants.*

*“Just as the Bourbons were the dynasty of the big landed property and the Orleans the dynasty of money, so the Bonapartes are the dynasty of the peasants, that is, the French masses. The chosen of the peasantry is not the Bonaparte who submitted to the bourgeois parliament but the Bonaparte who dismissed the bourgeois parliament. For three years the towns had succeeded in falsifying the meaning of the December 10 election and in cheating the peasants out of the restoration of the Empire. The election of December 10, 1848, has been consummated only by the coup d'etat of December 2, 1851.*

*“The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is furthered by France's poor means of communication and the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, permits no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no multifariousness of development, no diversity of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient, directly produces most of its consumer needs, and thus acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society.*

*“A small holding, the peasant and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department.*

*“Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homonymous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.*

*“Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class.*

*“They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power which subordinates society to itself.”*

In 2014, does the ANC “subordinate society to itself”? Its opponents accuse it of such. Its supporters disagree.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Chapters 1 and part of Chapter 6, and Chapter 7, Marx.](#)



Louis Bonaparte as a bat, balancing Thiers and the Republic

## The Civil War in France

Lenin's 1917 "[The State and Revolution](#)" is a classic that we will get to later on during this course on "The Classics". What we can say about it now is that in that book Lenin goes through some of the other classics, just as we are doing now. In particular, he devotes a whole chapter to the Paris Commune, basing it on Marx's classic book and today's featured Classic, "[The Civil War in France](#)".

A downloadable file of Chapter 5 of Marx's book is attached, and linked below. Let us defer to Lenin and use some of his work as our main introduction to it.

Early on in his "[Paris Commune](#)" chapter, Lenin refers to another classic, the Manifesto, pointing out that it was modified by Marx and Engels after 1871. This is what Lenin says, while quoting them:

'The last preface to the new German edition of the Communist Manifesto, signed by both its authors, is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and

Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the Communist Manifesto "has in some details become out-of-date", and they go on to say:

*"... One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'...."[1]*

'The authors took the words that are in single quotation marks in this passage from Marx's book, *The Civil War in France*.'

Lenin goes on:

'Marx's idea is that the working class must break up, smash the "ready-made state machinery", and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it.

'On April 12, 1871, i.e., just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

*"If you look up the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it [Marx's italics--the original is zerbrechen], and this is the precondition for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting."*

Lenin proceeds:

'Today, [i.e. in 1917] in Britain and America, too, "the precondition for every real people's revolution" is the smashing, the destruction of the "ready-made state machinery"...

'Secondly, particular attention should be paid to Marx's extremely profound remark that the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine is "the precondition for every real people's revolution". This idea of a "people's revolution" seems strange coming from Marx, so that the Russian Plekhanovites and Mensheviks, those followers of Struve who wish to be regarded as Marxists, might possibly declare such an expression to be a "slip of the pen" on Marx's part. They have reduced Marxism to such a state of wretchedly liberal distortion that nothing exists for them beyond the antithesis between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution, and even this antithesis they interpret in an utterly lifeless way.



'If we take the revolutions of the 20th century as examples we shall, of course, have to admit that the Portuguese and the Turkish revolutions are both bourgeois revolutions. Neither of them, however, is a "people's" revolution, since in neither does the mass of the people, their vast majority, come out actively, independently, with their own economic and political demands to any noticeable degree. By contrast, although the Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905-07 displayed no such "brilliant" successes as at the time fell to the Portuguese and Turkish revolutions, it was undoubtedly a "real people's" revolution, since the mass of the people, their majority, the very lowest social groups, crushed by oppression and exploitation, rose independently and stamped on the entire course of the revolution the imprint of their own demands, their attempt to build in their own way a new society in place of the old society that was being destroyed.

'In Europe, in 1871, the proletariat did not constitute the majority of the people in any country on the Continent. A "people's" revolution, one actually sweeping the majority into its stream, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat and the peasants. These two classes then constituted the "people". These two classes are united by the fact that the "bureaucratic-military state machine" oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To smash this machine, to break it up, is truly in the interest of the "people", of their majority, of the workers and most of the peasants, is "the precondition" for a free alliance of the poor peasant and the proletarians, whereas without such an alliance democracy is unstable and socialist transformation is impossible.'

The lessons of the Paris Commune are many. Here are some of Marx's own words from our chosen chapter:

*"...no sooner do the working men anywhere take the subject [emancipation of labour] into their own hands with a will, than uprises at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society with its two poles of capital and wages-slavery (the landlord now is but the sleeping partner of the capitalist), as if the capitalist society was still in its purest state of virgin innocence, with its antagonisms still undeveloped, with its delusions still unexploded, with its prostitute realities not yet laid bare. The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization!*

*"Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free*

*and associated labour. But this is communism, "impossible" communism! Why, those member of the ruling classes who are intelligent enough to perceive the impossibility of continuing the present system — and they are many — have become the obtrusive and full-mouthed apostles of co-operative production.*

*"If co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production — what else, gentlemen, would it be but communism, "possible" communism?"*

Factual note: What had happened in France was that Louis Bonaparte, the nobody, the returned exile, who juggled the classes and deceived them all, had made himself an "Emperor". But he ran out of options after two decades in power. He decided to make a foolish war on the Prussians, who beat the French and advanced to Versailles, outside Paris. The French government then abandoned Paris like cowards: Hence the formation of the self-governing Paris Commune. In Versailles, a suburb of royal palaces, the Germans (Prussians and others) for the first time agreed among themselves to form a single nation, while at the same time licensing and assisting the defeated French bourgeoisie to destroy their own compatriots (the Communards) in Paris.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Civil War in France, Chapter 5, The Paris Commune.](#)
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1848 in Berlin

## 1850 Address to the Communist League

When history is on the move the changes run all over the place. The job of the communists is invariably to urge history on, and to push all the players, including the bourgeoisie, to play their parts to the utmost extent.

The phrase "permanent revolution" belongs first to Marx (and not to Trotsky). It comes from the March, 1850 Address given by Karl Marx to the Central Committee of the Communist League, of which "permanent revolution" are the last two words. See the attached, or below for a link to a downloadable file of this great document.

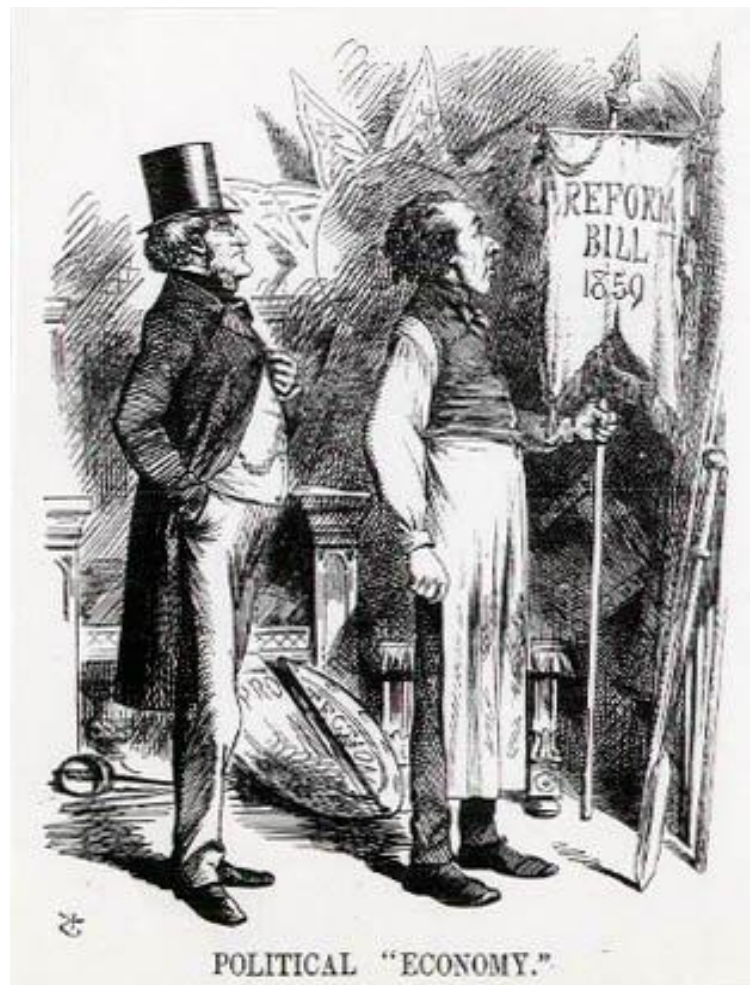
"Permanent revolution" only means a qualitative change that will be defended.

It does not mean that the revolution is irreversible. Nor does it mean that the revolution has to be repeated constantly like the punishment of Sisyphus.

The March, 1850 Address to the Communist League is an internationalist document. At the time, the newly formed communist organisations were active all over Europe, in a time when monarchies were falling and feudalism was on the way out in many countries.

This document needs to be read with care and attention!

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Address to the Communist League Central Committee, March 1850, Marx.](#)



## Political Economy

This part of our course on the revolutionary Classics is concerned with the hard-working period that followed the 1848 revolutions in France, Germany and other European countries and which culminated in the publication in 1867 of Volume 1 of Karl Marx's "Capital", which is the greatest Marxist "classic" of them all. That book is too large to accommodate in this ten-week course. It has a ten-part course of its own, followed by a further ten-part course on Volumes 2 and 3.

After the insurrections of 1848-1852, Karl Marx got down to work on the unsolved problem of what he called "the source of the self-increase of capital". Marx's working papers are collected in the enormous "[Grundrisse](#)", of which "Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (download linked below) is Chapter 1.

Marx read everything. He compiled notes of all the Political Economy books that had been written before him (eventually published as "Capital Volume 4", also

called “Theories of Surplus Value”), and he compiled an outline or plan for the first volume of his masterpiece, “Capital”, which is fully named “A Critique of Political Economy”.

The “Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” was written in 1857. It precedes another, different work of Marx’s called “[A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy](#)” that was published two years later, and which itself precedes Capital Volume 1 (the full “critique”) by eight years. Capital Volume 1 was published (in German) in 1867.

## **Economics**

First and foremost, today’s text reminds us that none of these works of Marx’s are comparable to **economics**. On the contrary, they expose “economics” as a false and fraudulent discipline. Instead of economics, Marx’s works deal with what would now be called proper **political economy**, or in other words the real relations between actual classes of people.

Marx begins by clearly differentiating his argument from that of the romantic philosopher **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**, and also from **Adam Smith**, and from **David Ricardo**, upon whom in other respects Marx relies quite heavily. It is worth quoting this passage at some length:

*“The solitary and isolated hunter or fisherman, who serves Adam Smith and Ricardo as a starting point, is one of the unimaginative fantasies of eighteenth-century romances à la Robinson Crusoe; and despite the assertions of social historians, these by no means signify simply a reaction against over-refinement and reversion to a misconceived natural life.*

*“No more is Rousseau’s contrat social, which by means of a contract establishes a relationship and connection between subjects that are by nature independent, based on this kind of naturalism. This is an illusion and nothing but the aesthetic illusion of the small and big Robinsonades.*

*“It is, on the contrary, the anticipation of “bourgeois society”, which began to evolve in the sixteenth century and in the eighteenth century made giant strides towards maturity.*

*“The individual in this society of free competition seems to be rid of natural ties, etc., which made him an appurtenance of a particular, limited aggregation of human beings in previous historical epochs. The prophets of the eighteenth century, on whose shoulders Adam Smith and Ricardo were still wholly standing, envisaged this 18th-century individual – a product of the dissolution of feudal society on the one hand and of the new productive forces*



*evolved since the sixteenth century on the other – as an ideal whose existence belonged to the past.*

*“They saw this individual not as an historical result, but as the starting point of history; not as something evolving in the course of history, but posited by nature, because for them this individual was in conformity with nature, in keeping with their idea of human nature.”*

A little later on in the “Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”, Marx writes:

*“But all this is not really what the economists are concerned about in the general part. It is rather – see for example Mill – that production, as distinct from distribution, etc., is to be presented as governed by eternal natural laws which are independent of history, and at the same time bourgeois relations are clandestinely passed off as irrefutable natural laws of society in abstracto. This is the more or less conscious purpose of the whole procedure.”*

So Marx is saying, in 1857, that the purpose of all the economic “analysts” (the likes of Azzar Jammie et cetera) then as now, is to falsely pass off bourgeois reality as the permanent and the only possible reality.

The entire text is worth reading. It will be helpful towards understanding Capital Volume 1, as well as towards understanding the politics of today’s massive price rises, which are invariably, and falsely, presented in our bourgeois media as “governed by eternal natural laws which are independent of history”.

The cartoon (“Reform Bill 1859”) is by **Tenniel**, from the London magazine “**Punch**”, made at the time when Karl Marx was working in London on his critiques of political economy. It illustrates the bourgeois turn from “protectionism” to “free trade” (now called “globalisation”). This happened when it suited the capitalists, whether it suited the workers or not. It happened in Britain approximately a century before it happened in the USA.

In this period, Marx continued to be, as we would say, “active”. In the next part, we will see the momentous role that Marx was about to play as an individual leader in the foundation of structures which were the fore-runners of many still-existing revolutionary organisations of today, including the SACP.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy 1857, Marx.](#)**
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Revolution in Paris, France: February 1848

## The First International

The [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 is a deliberately internationalist document. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were deployed to write it by the international [Communist League](#), of which they were members. The League was strongly based among continental workers in London. The first edition of the Manifesto was printed there, in German. Marx was running a part of the League in Brussels, Belgium; Engels was in Germany; and Communist League members were in action in [many other countries](#) including France.

The Manifesto's publication coincided almost exactly with the outbreak of revolution in France, in February of 1848, which quickly spread to many other countries. The final [Chapter IV](#) of the Manifesto says among other things that: “... *the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things,*” and it finishes with the famous slogan ***“Working Men of All Countries, Unite!”***

The Communist Manifesto is one of the first two published books of Marxism. The other book is “The Poverty of Philosophy”. Both were written and published in 1847/early 1848. Marxism was internationalist from the start and it has never ceased to be so.

Most of the revolutions of 1848 were aimed at overthrowing feudal monarchies or in other words **turning kingdoms into republics**, if necessary by the proletariat

supporting the bourgeoisie in the anti-monarchy revolution. The content of Marxist internationalism still includes relentless opposition to monarchy, and also class alliance with elements of the national bourgeoisie against Imperialism.

Marx's 1864 Address to the International Working Men's Association ([The First International](#)) was the consequence of his being invited and elected to the leadership of that organisation. It was formed in London in a hall next to where the South African High Commission now stands. Please read the Address in the PDF version attached and linked below. Marx had been in exile in London since 26 August 1849 after being banished in quick succession from Belgium, Germany and France. By 1864, Marx's reputation was that of being the foremost internationalist of his time.

The First International survived until shortly after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. The [Second International](#) was established at a gathering in Chur, Switzerland ten years later in 1881, two years before Marx's death in 1883 and fourteen years before Engels' death in 1895.

The Second International fostered Lenin, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg among many others. Its collapse in 1914 marked the great division between the opportunists (such as "the renegade" Kautsky) who in the face of imperialist war folded their internationalism and became cowardly national chauvinists, and on the other hand the true internationalists like Luxemburg and Lenin who opposed the imperialist war. These latter ones, the true internationalists, were also the communists, who established the communist parties that still exist today.

The [Third International](#), also called the [Communist International](#) (or Comintern) was launched in Soviet Russia less than two years after the October Revolution, in 1919, and in 1921 it admitted the Communist Party of South Africa into membership, thereby founding the party that is today known as the South African Communist Party, the SACP.

The history of the communists is an unbroken line of internationalism, of which the SACP is an indissoluble part. There is no communism separate from internationalism. The SACP is still internationalist and continues to promote the same relentless anti-monarchical, anti-feudal, anti-colonial, anti-neo-colonial, anti-imperialist cause as before and it will do so until the day of continental permanent proletarian revolution arrives in Africa.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [International Working Mens' Association Inaugural Address, 1864, Marx.](#)**



## Value, Price and Profit

By 1863 Karl Marx had a [sketch plan](#) that was beginning to resemble the shape of the full work that was published in 1867 as “Capital, Volume 1”.

By 1865 when he did “[Value, Price and Profit](#)” (**download** linked below), Marx had solved most of the literary as well as the theoretical problems of his master-work.

“Value, Price and Profit” is an address delivered by Karl Marx at two sessions of the General Council of the First International on June 20 and 27, 1865. This is a point where Karl Marx’s theoretical work comes face-to-face with his activities as a political leader, and actually the principal political leader of the International Working Men’s Association, otherwise known as the First International.

The [Introduction to the 1969 edition](#) of “Value, Price and Profit” makes clear that this June 1863 moment was crucial in the history of the organised working class, and that Marx saved the day and saved the movement with this outstanding, classic piece of work.

“Value, Price and Profit” has subsequently served various purposes. Because it debunks the argument, still used by employers in South Africa today, that wage rises cause unemployment, “Value, Price and Profit” has been a mainstay for generations of shop stewards and union negotiators.

A version of the same anti-working-class “fixed fund” argument countered by Marx was used by Richard Baloyi, the employing Public Services Minister, during the 2010 public service workers’ strike in Johannesburg. Another version was the economist Mike Schussler’s argument that workers are overpaid in South Africa.

Furthermore, and prefiguring Lenin’s argument against “Economism” four decades later in “What is to be Done?”, “Value, Price and Profit” states clearly that trade unionism without political organisation will never succeed in throwing off the yoke of capital (see the excerpt from Chapter 14).

This abridged version of “Value, Price and Profit” can also serve as a “mini-Capital”, i.e. as the short version of “Capital” that so many people yearn for. It will at least help us to get a better grip on some of the key concepts such as Labour, Value, Labour-Power, Surplus-Labour, Surplus-Value and Profit.

The two quoted paragraphs that follow are particularly instructive. Hobbes’ 1651 book “Leviathan” was a tremendous groundbreaker; Karl Marx notes here that Hobbes had *“instinctively hit upon this point overlooked by all his successors”*, namely the distinction between Labour-Power and Labour, which Marx had worked so hard and so long to see clearly (see the remarks about the hunt for surplus value in our earlier post on [Wage Labour and Capital](#))

*‘What the working man sells is not directly his labour, but his labouring power, the temporary disposal of which he makes over to the capitalist. This is so much the case that I do not know whether by the English Laws, but certainly by some Continental Laws, the maximum time is fixed for which a man is allowed to sell his labouring power. If allowed to do so for any indefinite period whatever, slavery would be immediately restored. Such a sale, if it comprised his lifetime, for example, would make him at once the lifelong slave of his employer.*

*‘One of the oldest economists and most original philosophers of England — Thomas Hobbes — has already, in his [“Leviathan”](#), instinctively hit upon this point overlooked by all his successors. He says: “the value or worth of a man is, as in all other things, his price: that is so much as would be given for the use of his power.” Proceeding from this basis, we shall be able to determine the value of labour as that of all other commodities.’*

“Value, Price and Profit” includes a counter-intuitive surprise in Marx’s statement that “Profit is made by Selling a Commodity at its Value”. In other words, capitalism would still exist even if it had to shed its nasty price-gouging habits. Capitalism as such is not a simple swindle, but it is a system and a class relationship.

The source of the “self-increase of capital” is located in the workplace, and not in the marketplace. This is the fundamental message of “Capital”, the greatest “classic” of them all. “Capital” will not be included here but it will have its own separate, dedicated course. “Value, Price and Profit” will have to represent it here.

In the next part of this course on the classics, we will move to the period after the publication of “Capital”, when with the active involvement of Marx and Engels, the working-class movement revived, organised and expanded in Europe as never before in history.

The image is of a capitalist, by [George Grosz](#).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Value, Price and Profit, Chapters 6 to 10, 1865, Marx; Excerpt from Chapter 14.](#)
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**Course: The Classics**

**21001, The Classics, Introductions Booklet 1 of 3**

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